SIATRAS NUMISMATIC STUDIES, 15

Jean N. Svoronos

THE MEDIAEVAL COINS OF RHODES
& Other Topics on Byzantine Numismatics

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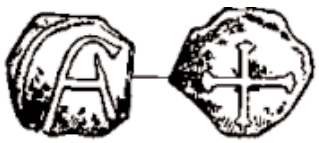

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Jean N. Svoronos (1863-1922)

THE MEDIAEVAL COINS OF RHODES
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Edited, translated into English and published by Demetrius Siatras.
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FOREWORD

This book comprises six short studies by J.G. Svoronos, originally written in Greek and published together under the title

Βυζαντινὰ νομισματικὰ ζητήματα

in the second volume of the *Journal international d'archéologie numismatique* (1898), which he himself founded and successfully directed. The collection was later reprinted as a monograph by the publishers Barth and von Hirst (Athens, 1899). Of particular interest are the studies Ε′ and ϛ′, which also constitute the bulk of the book. In Ε′, Svoronos resolves the mystery of the so-called "briquets"—the aenigmatic symbols depicted on the coats of arms, flags, and coins of the Palaiologan dynasty, as they were known to 19th-century numismatists. In ϛ′, he examines the coins minted in Rhodes during the 13th century, up until the island's conquest by the knights of the Order of Saint John.

Modern research has contributed little to these specific topics; therefore, despite the passage of time since its first publication, the book remains relevant and merits both a new edition and an English translation.

D.N.S.

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which reads *καταβολὴ κιβδήλου* (keeping in mind that during that era the iota adscript was never used) and not *καταβοᾷ κιβδήλου.*

The whole inscriptions are restored as follows:

+ ΧΑΡ — ΑΓΜΑ ϹΕ — ΠΤΟΝ϶ — ΑΤΑΒΟΛΙ϶ΥΒ — ΔΗΛΟΥ

+ ΧΑΡ — ΑΜΑ ϹΕΠ — ΤΟ ϶ΑΤΑΒ|ΟΛΗ϶ΥΒΔ — ΙΛΛΟΥ

i.e. + *Χάραγμα σεπτὸν καταβολὴ κυβδήλου*

+ *Χάραμα σεπτὸ καταβολὴ κυβδίλλου*

The deterioration of the second piece, in terms of pronunciation and spelling, is due to the engraving conditions. The first piece (whose style suggests it is the older one) was struck according to the text officially provided by the authorities to the "*χαρακτὴς*" (engraver), while the second piece was made from memory. Even today Greek people say *χάραμα* and *σεπτὸ* instead of *χάραγμα* and *σεπτόν*.

Finally, I found in the *Catalogue of the Byzantine coins of the Photiades Pasha' Collection* (Paris 1890, p. 48, No. 675, Plate II), compiled by Froehner, the description and image of a third similar piece by Andronicus. Froehner still believes he is looking at a hexagion, but he correctly reads the inscription (without adding any further comment or explanation):

Χάραγμα σεπτὸν καταβολὴ κιβδήλου

Actually, instead of Froehner's reading

Ἀνδρόνικος — καταβολὴ κιβδίλου

the inscription reads

Ἀντρόνικος Δεσπό(της) — καταβολὴ κιβδήλου.

Below is an accurate description of the piece, based on the excellent image from the catalogue:

> Silver, 29 mm. — ΑΝΤΡ[Ο]Ν[Κ]ΟϹ left, Δ[Ε]ϹΠΟ[ΤΗϹ] right. Emperor and empress (Andronicus II and his wife Irene) stand facing each other and holding a double cross between them. The whole in a circle of dots.

+ ΧΑΡ	+ *Χάρ-*
ΑΓΜΑϹΕ	*αγμα σε-*
ΠΤΟ϶ΚΑΤ	*πτὸν κατ-*
ΑΒΟΛΗ϶ΥΒ	*αβολὴ κυβ-*
ΔΗΛΟΥ	*δήλου*

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before the House of Burgundy adopted them, and (b) that the briquets had a specific shape in the 13th century, when the Palaeologans begun to use them as a symbol — who knows why. We believe that we are able to prove both.

From the illustrious Florentine house of the Acciaiuoli, which emerged in the 12th century, the most famous member was Dardanus Acciaiuoli; he served as treasurer to the king of Naples and held high office in Florence from the beginning of the 14th century; he also served as director of the Mint in 1317 and 1318. Dardanus therefore bore the acciaiuolo as his coat of arms, a name that combines his surname with the first name of his grandfather; in the official book of the Mint of Florence, published by Orsini, Dardanus is mentioned among other officials of the Mint; we read the following about the coins minted in 1318:

> *Quorum tempore coniati fuerunt floreni de auro, signati signo acciaiuoli in presenti facie picto.*

And a little below it:

> *Item eorum tempore coniati fuerunt floreni guelfi de argento novi valor triginta den. parvorum pro quolibet floreno argenti, signati signo acciaiuoli in presenti facie supra picto.*[55]

On the margin of the page the acciaiuolo is depicted as ℶ while on the silver grosz it is engraved as ℸ, without any modification, exactly as it is found on the coins of the Palaeologans. That the *acciaiuolo* is the πυρεκβόλον or briquet is beyond dispute. Therefore, we can now be certain that the πυρεκβόλον existed as a heraldic emblem from the beginning of the 14th century, that it had the shape of the letter ℬ and that the symbols frequently depicted on the coins of the Palaiologans are indeed briquets; and there is no doubt that the surrounding the cross briquets are those mentioned by Codinus as appearing on the imperial flag. Since the cross with the four briquets is not found on any Byzantine monument prior to the Palaeologan period, how can we explain the isolated amphora

[55] Ign. Orsini, *Storia della monete della Republica Fiorentina*, 1760, p. 26.

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Fig. 9 (Sabatier, pl. LII 22). Alexius Comnenus. See also Manuel Comn., LVI 8.

Fig. 10 (Sabatier, pl. LXII 2). Andronicus II Palaeologus.

Fig. 11 (Sabatier, pl. LXV 6, 7). Theodore Doucas Vatatzes (of Nicaea).

Fig. 12 (Sabatier, pl. LXVI 9). Manuel Angelus (of Thessalonica).

τρόπαιον, as Eusebius Pamphilus, the first author who wrote about it, calls the cross of Constantine's vision, is usually found under the following types on the Comnenian and Palaeologan coinages.

Sometimes, the type depicted in the Figures 9 and 10 is accompanied by the famous inscription NI-KA *(ἐν τούτῳ νίκα)* or simply

$$\overline{\text{IC}}\ \overline{\text{XP}}\ \text{NIKA}.$$

A similar cross type is found on the flag used by the emperors of this era, especially of Nicaea and Thessalonica (Figures 11 and 12).

To the same type belongs the cross of the flag found on coins of much earlier emperors, *e.g.* Constantine Pōgōnatos (Sabatier XXXVI, 6), Mauricius Tiberius (Sabatier XXV, 28), Justinian (Sabatier XIII, 12). To trace the earliest forms of the cross on coins, we must return to the era of Constantine the Great — particularly to those used at the very beginning, which consisted of the letters

I, X and P = *Ἰ(ησοῦ) Χ(ριστοῦ) Σταυρός.*

Here, again, the letter X signifies the radiant, fire-emitting rays of the cross of light; yet this very depiction of Constantine the Great and Helene (Figure 13) shows them holding a cross adorned with fire-emitting rays composed of sparkling gemstones.[68]

In the image of Maxentius' murder by Constantine, we also see the cross from the vision, where once again Constantine is surrounded by

[68] Sp. Lambros, *Ἱστορία τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, vol. 3, p. 286. [69] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

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